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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4875

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1028

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9800

RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0261

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4258

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1720

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3448

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0445

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6897

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4513

RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0538

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2784

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001057

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/23/2016

TAGS: PGOV PHUM BM

SUBJECT: INSPIRING THOSE WHO SEEK CHANGE IN BURMA

REF: A. A) RANGOON 918

¶B. B)RANGOON 505

¶C. C)RANGOON 227

Classified By: CDA Villarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶11. (C) Summary: Ludu Sein Win shows what can be done in Burma today, contradicting the many who have concluded that nothing can be done. He defied his police monitors to write a well-articulated plea for change that appeared May 23 in the International Herald Tribune. Increasing desperation has increased the likelihood of change in Burma, although he doubts dialogue will achieve it. Sein Win recommends that all opposition forces unite, and sees the only unifying leader as Aung San Suu Kyi. He disparaged the current leadership of NLD. He meets regularly with young people to teach them English and journalism, and believes that they will bring about the long overdue change Burma requires. He offers a clear view of the way forward that other pro-democracy figures miss while they bicker among themselves over who's in charge. End Summary

¶12. (C) The Burmese People Can't Wait Much Longer" appeared May 23 in the International Herald Tribune providing a well-articulated argument for change by Ludu Sein Win. He decided to risk police harassment and possible arrest after the regime rejected the NLD proposal earlier this year for de facto recognition of SPDC as the executive in return for seating the Parliament elected in 1990 (Refs B and C). Sein Win has been a reporter since 1946, spent 13 years in prison during the Ne Win era, and currently contributes to 15 weekly and 17 monthly periodicals notwithstanding censorship and police monitoring. He remains close to Ludu Daw Ahma, the publisher of his original publication Ludu (The People) newspaper (ref A). He said the only official reaction to his IHT oped to date was the rejection of all of his articles for publication for a couple of weeks. Usually only one out of three of his articles cannot get past the censors.

¶13. (C) On oxygen and with a walker, Sein Win told Charge July 18 that since he can't get out much, writing articles is the only way to help his country. At a time when many longtime political activists speak of despair and hopelessness, Sein Win asserted "the soul of the people can't be killed," young Burmese have that same soul and will dare to take risks. He discounted opinions that the Burmese are too frightened to demand change, pointing out that demands for reforms have occurred every 3 or 4 years since 1962, and claimed there are "thousands of others in Burma" like him. He said that people are so desperate and depressed now "the stone is at the edge and just some force is required to push it down finally."

Leadership More Important than Dialogue

¶14. (C) Sein Win rued the lack of leadership which has paralyzed NLD. He disparaged the elderly "self-appointed" Central Executive Committee "uncles", whom he noted had been close to former dictator Ne Win. The only unifying leader is Aung San Suu Kyi. Although he disagrees with many of her positions, he sees her as "sincere and honest." He disagreed with advocates of a "third force" to bypass NLD, since this would only divide proponents of reform. Better to strengthen the one existing force, he named several NLD women who would be better leaders than the "uncles," praising the women's bravery and firmness. He would like ASSK to make a "clear call" to action rather than her previous statements that democracy was up to the people themselves. He also recommended that NLD do more to train young people and encourage youth empowerment, to rejuvenate the leadership, noting that the military has been promoting younger people.

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¶15. (C) Although his oped called for talks as "the only way for a decent and smooth regime change," Sein Win dismissed the utility of dialogue saying "there is no precedent in history that dialogue works and dictators voluntarily relinquish power." Since the object of dialogue is to transfer power to the people, he doubted the regime would ever agree. Instead, he suggested that NLD should stand on the results of the 1990 election. He also advocated a general amnesty to encourage the widest participation of insurgent groups, communists, socialists, and democrats. He rejected the current National Convention as unrepresentative with only government appointees, and agreed with NLD's decision against participating.

¶16. (C) While dialogue might have been possible when the current generals rose to power after 1988, Sein Win said they had become stronger and more rigid over time. He regretted the NLD offer mentioned in para 2 came 15 years too late. He discounted the possibilities of splits within the military saying they are even more afraid than the civilians since they are "nearer to the gun than the people." He said the senior generals had been trained by Fascist Japan and still practiced Fascist ways of managing the army, such as seniors slapping and kicking juniors. At the same time he called them "opportunist," joining Japan to fight the British during WWII, then turning back to the British to drive the Japanese out.

¶17. (C) Sein Win praised the U.S. approach to Burma as committed in comparison to the EU. He said economic sanctions alone would not work and called for an unspecified combination of diplomatic and political sanctions. In particular, he recommended the U.S. prod China more, a country he described as "only focus(ed) on money." Since China values its trading relationship with the U.S. more than with Burma, he concluded that China would listen to the U.S. regarding "pro-democratic changes."

¶18. (C) Comment: Numerous articles regularly appear in Burmese publications that can be read as indirect criticisms

of the regime. Many of those articles were written by Sein Win under various pseudonyms, and we have met others like him. The contrast between the frail, elderly Sein Win and the frail, elderly NLD "uncles" is great. Sein Win believes in young people, meets with them, and inspires them. The "uncles" in contrast believe that young people should be seen and not heard. He speaks clearly, directly, forthrightly and positively, while the "uncles" meander and complain. All are committed to political reform, but likely differ as to the direction it should take: Sein Win would support open debate, while the "uncles" would try to control reform. Change is long overdue, but it requires more inspirational figures like Ludu Sein Win and Aung San Suu Kyi to get people moving.

VILLAROSA